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Among Mimes, Masters of Taste and the ancient Roads of Latin

Contents

Preface

 Here I have collected together several works on Latin literature and language. The first, titled *Publilius Syrus and a Consummate Liar*, is about the original meaning of the fragments of Publilius Syrus. The second is titled *The supposed realism of Petronius Arbiter.* According to many scholars and Italian artists like P.P. Pasolini and Federico Fellini, Petronius Arbiter would have written realistically, giving his audience vivid pictures of actual everyday Rome life. So Petronius Arbiter would have established himself both as the Father of the modern novel and the mirror of the Roman society. But it's not actually all true.

The third, titled *Petronius Arbiter and The Matron of Ephesus*, deals with Petronius Arbiter's life and works. The article is divided into two parts: the first presents the plot of the novel; the second deals with both the Latin tradition and Virgil (and his fortune through the centuries).

The fourth, titled *From the Proto and Medieval Latin to Renaissance Humanism,* deals with the origins and development of Latin throughout the centuries. Latin, as is now widely known in a number of publications appeared on comparative studies, belongs to the large group of sister languages like Iranian, Slavonic, Ancient Greek, Sanskrit, and Italic. It derives from Proto-Indo-European, which we know is not just an ethnic but a linguistic concept.

Publilius Syrus and a Consummate Liar

Publilius Syrus (1st century BC) was so named because was a native of Antioch, Syria. Publilius was a *libertus* (=freedman), and one of the most famous mimes in the age of Caesar. He was a slave, but his abilities gained him manumission, and he became so popular that under Julius Caesar he was called to Rome where there were public games ("per Caesaris ludos" [games]) [Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, 2, 7, 7-8). The ancient writers did not say in what year Publilius Syrus died, but the famous Latin author Petronius Arbiter said he made his career under the Emperor Nero, and that he died at a good old age.

According to a hypothesis of Bothe, there were two Publilii, the first one wrote the *Murmurco*; the second Publilius Syrus was the author of the *Putatores* (M. Bonaria). The mime was of Greek origin, providing both a very strong form of realism, and using a trivial and scurrilous language. Despite Publilius Syrus had been both the leading mime-writer and actor in Rome, almost nothing of his writings remains, except four doubtful fragments. On the contrary, there are about 700 proverbs or *Sententiae* still very well-known. The preliminary results reported here constitute a first approach in attempting to restore the sense of these fragments.

Murmurco

The first fragment is titled *Murmurco*, [=The Grumbler? (Ribbeck's conjecture)], and it was handed down to us by Priscianus (10.42):

 "… Cellas servorum converri…"

This fragment of the verse is linked to a verse of Plautus (*Stichus*, II, 2, 64): "Reverram hercle hoc quod **converri** modo." The slave states that he should sweep (*converri*) again in the house that he had laid out. For the other two terms, they are closely related to each other, because "cellas" refers to the "cubicula [cellae] servorum." The Roman writers identified slave rooms as "cellae," that is the small spaces assigned to slaves. On this basis, it is possible to obtain a generic sense of the fragment, which could be translated as follows,

"You can order someone to clean up the servant rooms."

This sentence may be considered as interrogative sentence (Can you order someone …slaves?) or imperative sentence (Clean up slave rooms!), but the lack of any context makes it highly questionable. We also have complete uncertainty about the title. *Murmurco* is Ribbeck's conjecture, and the difficulties of interpretation are due to the alterations of Medieval copyists. This is particularly noticeable with *Mumurco*, where the title has some notable variants.

The manuscripts differ sometimes considerably, so that we list: *Murmurithone* (R), *Muromonthones* (B1), *Mauromonthones* (B2) *Muromuithone* (D), *Muromunthone* (H), *Muro Munthone* (L), *Muro Mutuni* and *Murco Mutuni* (Costas Panayotakis. And also by a Scholiast's note on Publilius Syrus we read *Murmurthone* (Christian Friedrich).

The second fragment is titled *Putatores*, and it sounds like this:

"Progredere et ne quis latibuletur, prospice…" (Nonius, 133.7).

 A possible translation would be, "Look and see if there is someone hidden…". This request could be made by the owner to his servant, or it could be the request of a servant to another servant. But the loss of other verses produces an ambiguity that makes interpretation difficult if not impossible.

Ribbeck's comment:

"Progrédere et ne quis làtibuletur, pròspice…. Nonius, 133, 7." (Ribbeck, p. 368). Ribbeck accepts the variant reading *progredere* and *prospice*, but he notes that other two codes propose two variants, *praegredere* and *perspice*. Accepting the hypothetical alternatives, the meaning could be as follows: "**Praegredere** et ne quis latibuletur, **perspice**." The meaning do not change very much, "Proceed slowly and check whether there is someone hidden."

Petronius Arbiter's Satyricon

The largest fragment of Publilius has been kept in the *Satyricon* by Petronius Arbiter (chap. 55), and it was performed by the same Trimalchio, who previously underlined that "Cicero had more eloquence, but Publilius was much morally admirable." Although this fragment was largely attributed to Publilius Syrus, the Italian scholar N. Terzaghi wrote that the fragment is a real invention of Trimalchio. According to Ribbeck's edition, the fragment sounds like this:

… Luxùriae rictu Màrtis marcent moénia

Tuò palato claùsus pavo pàscitur

Plumàto amictus aùreo Babylònico,

Gallìna tibi Numìdica, tibi gallùs spado;

Cicònia etiam, gràta peregrina hòspita

Pietàticultrix gràcilipes crotalìstria,

Avis éxul hiemis, tìtulus tepidi témporis,

nequìtiae nidum in càccabo fecìt modo

Quo màrgaritam càram tibi, bacam 'Indicam?

Smaràgdum ad quam rem vìridem, pretiosùm vitrum

Quo Càrchedonios òptas ignes làpideos,

Nisi ùt scintilles pròbitas est carbùnculus

An ùt matrona ornàta phaleriis pélagiis

Tollàt pedes indòmita in strato extràneo?.

   Aequum ést induere nùptam ventum téxtilem,

   Palàm prostare nùdam in nebula lìnea?... (3)

 English Translation by M. Heseltine (1925)

  "The high walls of Mars crumble beneath the gaping jaws of luxury. To please thy palate the peacock in his Babylonian vesture of gilded feathers is prisoned and fed, for thee the guinea-fowl, and for thee the capon. Even our beloved foreign guest the stork, type of parental love, with thin legs and sounding rattle, the bird exiled by winter, the harbinger of the warm weather, has now built a nest in thine ab-horred cooking-pot. What are pearls of price, the fruits of India, to thee? For thy wife to be adorned with sea spoils when she lies un-checked on a strange man's bed? For what end dost thou require the green emerald, the precious crystal, or the fire that lies in the jewels of Carthage, save that honesty should shine forth from amid the carbuncles? Thy bride might as well clothe herself with a gar-ment of the wind as stand forth publicly naked under her clouds of muslin." (See Petronius. With an English Translation by M. Heseltine, London: William Heinemann LTD., MCMXXV (1925), p. 99).

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As mentioned above, Terzaghi and others (Bendz, 1941) believe that these verses were an "original performance" of Trimalchio. The debate is still open, but in the past there have been some scholars who gave good arguments to support the bona fides of these verses that surely belong to Publilius Syrus. So Lemaire about *rictu* wrote:

"*Rictu* [...] Durum est vocabulum et enormis metaphora, sed apta mimorum et Satiricorum stylo, cuius generis plura hoc in Publii fragmento observantur..." [*Rictu* is a harsh word and a metaphor of great impact, commonly used by **mimes and often in the satirical style. We can see many examples of this attitude in the fragments by Publilius].** Now, given the precise knowledge of these technical terms, several scholars (Sullivan, 1968) believed that actually the verses were not an invention of Trimalchio, but they belonged to Publilius Syrus. According to Lemaire, we can find the traditional "satiricorum stylo," [satyrical style].

The Sarabarae

The fourth fragment is as follows (Isid. Orig., 19.23, 2),

 "Quid érgo in ventre parti sarabaras tuo/ Suspénderit?"

The fragment seems completely devoid of any sense. But the learned comment of Ribbeck gives us valuable information about its interpretation:

"… Isidorus *Orig.* XIX 23 'sarabarae sunt fluxa ac sinuosa vestimenta de quibus legitur in Daniele […] Anthifanes in *Scythis* apud Poll. 7, 59. 10. 168. Ergo apud Syrum quoque Persae nescio cuius bracae rideri videntur…'."

 Ribbeck underlines that the sarabarae were clothes about which we can read in *The Book of Daniel*, and therefore that they were a kind of ridiculous pants or trousers worn by the Persians, later known as Parthians, and by the Romans as *Parthi*. So we read *parti* in this verse ["**parti** sarabaras tuo"] that is the Parthians. Then Ribbeck continues:

"… ' in ventre tuo parti (parthi Wolfenb. parthis Mon.) … In ventre Parthi (vel Parthi in u.) sarabaras tuo suspenderant…" (Ribbeck, p.370).

Taking into account the different lections offered by Ribbeck, maybe the verse could be restored as follows:

"Quid ergo? < Parthi > sarabaras <suas> suspenderint in ventre tuo?"

What did Publilius Syrus want to say with such an expression? One possible interpretation for this line could be:

"Is that the Parthians persuaded you to wear their [ridiculous] pants?"

We should see a clear metaphorical expression. It is well known that, as well as the best and most skillful Knights, the Parthians worn "ridiculous" large trousers, but they were also known as the most inveterate **liars**. This leads me to believe that Publilius Syrus was speaking ironically.

So the man wearing their trousers was just an out-and-out liar!

Sources

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About the doubts of N. Terzaghi, see Petronio. Il romanzo satirico, in *Il romanzo antico greco e latino*, Florence, Sansoni, 1973, p. 1397, and footnote 1, p. 959.

The most recent edition of Müller-Ehlers, [*Petronii Satirica*, Munich, 1965], differs from that of Ribbeck:

Luxuriae rictu Martis marcent moenia

  Tuo palato clausus pavo pascitur

  Plumato amictus aureo Babylonico,

  Gallina tibi Numidica, tibi gallus spado;

  Ciconia etiam, grata peregrina hospita

  Pietaticultrix gracilipes crotalistria,

  Avis exul hiemis, titulus tepidi temporis,

  nequitiae nidum in caccabo fecìt tuae'

  Quo margaritam caram tibi, bacam Indicam

  An ut matrona ornata phaleriis pelagiis

  Tollat pedes indomita in strato extraneo?

  Zmaragdum ad quam rem viridem, pretiosum vitrum?

Quo Carchedonios optas ignes lapideos?

  Nisi ut scintillet probitas e carbunculis.

  Aequum est induere nuptam ventum textilem,

  Palam prostare nudam in nebula linea?....

G. Bendz, "Sprachliche bemerkungen zu Petron", in *Eranos*, n. 39, 1941, p. 53. Bendz says that this fragment belongs to Petronius Arbiter.

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N. E. Lemaire, *Poetae latini minores…*, Parisiis, 1824, vol. II, p. 121, 1.

J. P. Sullivan, *The Satyricon of Petronius,* Bloomington and London, Indiana University Press, 1968, p. 192. Contrary to what Bendz claimed, P. Sullivan says that these fragments belong to Publilius Syrus.

The supposed realism of Petronius Arbiter

Petronius lived in Rome in the 1st century AD. He was a popular figure of Nero's Court, who had charged him with overseeing his elegant and refined life as *Arbiter Elegantiae*, or *Elegantiarum* [= *Arbiter* or *Master of Taste*]. Then he had fallen into disfavor with Nero, so losing affections of the Emperor by the slanders of envious courtiers. Petronius was then forced to commit suicide by the same emperor Nero. Most scholars agree, identifying Petronius the courtier with Petronius the author of the *Satyricon*, a work in prose and verse which was handed down to us in a fragmentary form. The *Satyricon* seems to be, most likely, a parody of Greek love-romances, a genre focused on the theme of thwarted love which was highly appreciated in Rome in the first century A.D. (1). We have only a fragment of the original whole, viz. the so called *excerpta vulgaria* formed by long excerpts, short extracts, and the *Cena Trimalchionis*, preserved in the *Traguriensis Code* [now **Parisinus LAT. 7989**], so named because it was discovered at Trau (Italian Traù and Lat. *Tragurium*) in Dalmatia, in the mid-17th century in the library belonging to Ettore Cippico (2). It contains the *Cena Trimalcionis* and other fragments like *The Matron of Ephesus*, whose story had a long tradition which had been handed down to us from Aesop, Phaedrus and from a story in prose of the so called *Romulus* (3). The *Satyricon* has the merit of containing some exceptionally brilliant sketches of manners and character. Trimalchio apart, other characters form a group of humorous, odd figures not easily to be forgotten: Fortunata, Encolpius, and the poet Eumolpus.

Since antiquity the Satyricon met an enormous success for its moral and stylistic eccentricities, which hurt the classic sensibility of many ages.

According to Tacitus (*Ann.* 16.18), Petronius Arbiter's real name was Titus (or Caius) Petronius Niger, a prominent member of the equestrian order (Knight), who had an even more distinguished career both as "consul suffectus" (who replaced a consul died in battle) in 62 A.D., and proconsul in Bithynia (4). Tacitus attested that the death by suicide of Petronius took place in 66 A.D., while he should be born in Marseilles around 20 A.D. (5).

The plot of the Satyricon

Persecuted by the anger of a god, Encolpius wanders around southern Italy from town to town with his friends Ascyltos and Giton, and thorough adventures of all kinds. At one point, , Eumolpus, an elderly and cultured poet, joins them. The most famous episode in the Satyricon was The *Cena Trimalchionis*, with the epic "Trimalcione Dinner," a banquet offered by the wealthy parvenus Trimalchio. The poet Eumolpus, after having quelled a violent argument ensued between the guests, tells them a funny story about women's inconstancy in love. In front of the corpse of her husband, a widow declares that, it is better to starve to death than remarry. However, very soon she forgets her husband and indulges herself in love affairs.

The reaction against cultural models

According to several scholars, the satirical work of Petronius Arbiter was a reaction against cultural models of his time, almost always prone to unconditional acceptance of the classics. Professor Dillon states that, "despite problems of interpretation [...] Petronius is profoundly anti-classical and iconoclastic [...] Petronius' profound anti-classicism [...] celebrates the here-and-now with abuse of the present, a world quite out of touch with contemporary reality" (6). Thus, the historical and political events of this period (the Neronian Age) would have been contributed to a disavowal of the literary ideals of the previous Augustan and Virgilian Golden Age. The political divisions would have broken up the spiritual unity of Latin literature, so the writers of the Neronian Age would have tended to become divided in their inspiration.

Now, in effect, although Petronius had lived in the time of Nero, and despite the fact he was the organizer of extraordinary and extravagant feasts and orgies into the Nero's palace, he was culturally far from the Roman emperor. Petronius affirmed the need for a strong philosophical culture, about which emperor Nero lacked (7). At times Petronius derided the steady trend towards the modern "controversiam sententiis vibrantibus pictam", "a forensic exercise speckled with glittering points" (*Satyr.*, 118,2) (8), proposed in the rhetorical schools, "Students [were] stultified by these exercises", Jensson said (9). If it weren't for the fact that, actually, Petronius was the organizer of Nero's feasts, it is quite difficult to understand why the Emperor could suffer a man who had literary and aesthetic theories in stark contrast with him.

It is not for nothing, that many scholars were at odds amongst themselves about the fact that Petronius was really the powerful courtier of Nero, suggesting instead that the author of the *Satyricon* was living from the 3rd or 4th centuries AD. It is true, that there were 96 different men with the name "Petronius" who lived in these centuries, but only one of them was called "Arbiter," and he was the organizer of Nero's feasts (10).
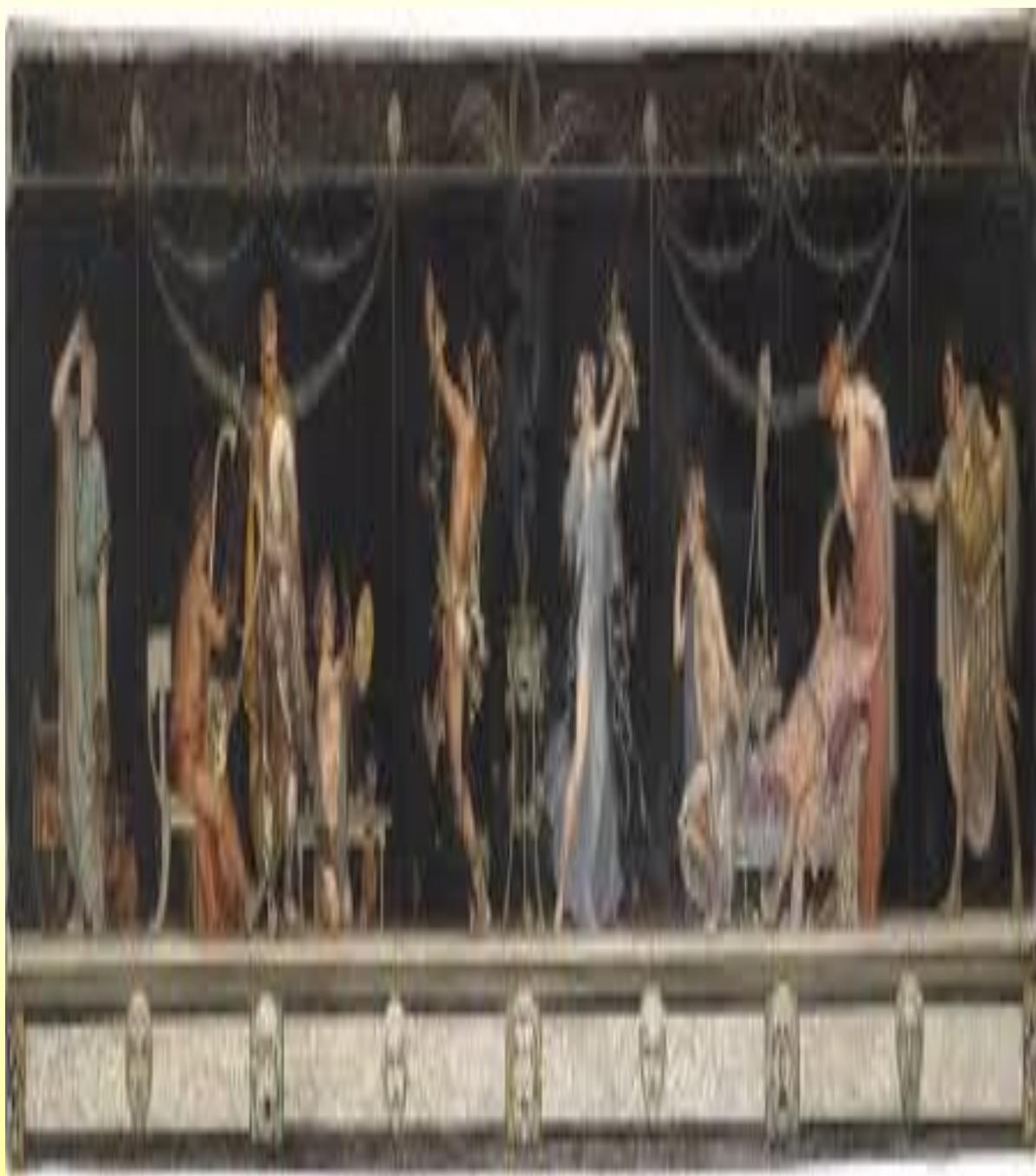
The leader of a New Realistic Movement

Thus, according to the analysis by some critics, the *Satyricon* refused all accepted standards, and old ideals, and was far from the sterner ways of life set by the Augustan Age. Petronius Arbiter would have been able to work with absolute freedom, becoming the leader of a *New Realistic Movement* in Latin literature which tried to assert the need for subverting the classical models and rules.

Who can deny it! The tendency of Augustan literature (and of Neronian canons of taste) was to escape from reality by creating improbable situations and types: "The conservative Roman taste for these ancient masters likewise forms a part of the historico-cultural context of first century Rome, " Jennson claims (11). Instead, Petronius Arbiter would have written *realistically*, giving his audience *vivid pictures* of actual everyday Rome life. So Petronius Arbiter would have established himself both as the *Father* of the *modern novel* and the *mirror* of the Roman society. In Klebs' view, Petronius was "the strongest realist of antiquity" and, "rather than creating a simple parody of epic, Petronius merely used an epic structure in the *Satyrica* for the purpose of achieving 'inner unity' for the otherwise loosely structured realistic portrayal of his times" (12).

The realism of the Satyrica is illusory

Without going into the merits of a question that would lead us too far at present, we'll simply refer to the important study by Jensson. In fact, the critical concept of Petronius's realism seems to have been just a collective hallucination (or illusion), because, as wittily noted by Gottskalk Jensson, despite the *triumph of realism* in the *Satyricon*, we are discussing further whether the "Graeca Urbs" was Naples, Pozzuoli or Cumae. So, if we find ourselves in such a condition, it does not follow that almost all scholars are incompetent, but that they lack real connections to the reality of the cities described in the *Satyricon*, "The real reason for this state of things is [...] the frustrating inconsistency of the information provided by the *Satyrica* itself" (13). Thus, "the realism of the *Satyrica* is **illusory**" (14). In his turn, F. Jones defined the Satyricon as "an ontological game," "where there is **no reality**, only representation of reality, but where some representations are nevertheless better than others" (15). Apart from the allusions to the moral corruption, everything is indeterminate in the *Satyricon*, highlighting the inability of Petronius's realism to go beyond moral issues, without letting us understand the interdependence of political and economic phenomena, and without giving satisfactory accounts of every place mentioned in his work. However, Professor E. Castorina was of the view that such a perspective was manifestly "excessive" because, in his opinion, there was no lack of essential information (16). However, he must face often insurmountable obstacles in attempting to explain a lot of critical problems in which conflicting points of view were examined, recognizing that "in discussing the Petronian question, we can only choose between equally precarious solutions and contradictions pushed to their limits" (17).

Professor Castorina, in taking a decisive step in solving the question of identifying the precise date of composition of the Satyricon, viz. the passage where Trimalchio says (Satyr. 2 .7) that "'Just now' ('nuper') this pompous verbiage has passed from Asia to Athens", these two words ("Just now") includes at least three conclusions that are totally different from each other. So professor Castorina concluded that he was "still waiting for a convincing explanation of that" (18). Given that the issue about the "Graeca Urbs," Neapoli, or Cumae simply got us nowhere, the problem has been revaluated (and above all "minimized") on the part of modern critics, saying that, "All in all, it's not so important in determining if this city was Puteoli, Neapoli, Cumae, Miseno or Capua (or even Minturno or Terracina)" (19). But actual self-evidence is that the limits of Petronius's realism are in full view for all to see.

We must recognize that also realism was always under the weight of a centuries-old convention and rule of composition established in Greek and Roman literature in relation to different literary genres. Regarding the genre of the Satyricon (satire, parody and so on), perhaps C. W. Mendell (1917) was right in his evaluation of Petronius's realism. He was "skeptical" about Petronius's supposed "realism":

"I am skeptical of the propriety of calling Petronius' work a realistic romance [...] My conclusions are these. The novel of Petronius is not, strictly speaking, a realistic novel. It is an erotic romance and belongs to the developed, not to the early, type of romance. Its essential type characteristics are those of the romance." (20).
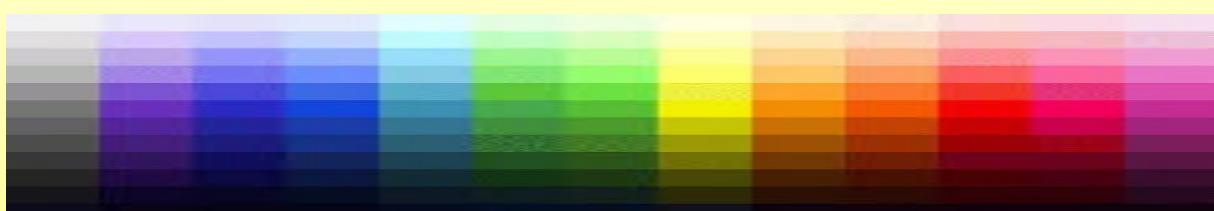
More recently, Jensson is inclined to believe that the *Milesiae Fabulae* must have been the main source for the *Satyricon*: " As a result, we conclude that the *Satyrica* is best classified with the other 'shameless' erotic fictions referred to in Roman sources as *Milesiae*, after Sisenna's early first century B.C.E. adaptation" (21). If we look carefully we can see how the substance of concept does not change. They agree that one cannot speak of true realism in the *Satyricon*.

Also, given that the real impossibility of classifying the *Satyricon* according to a particular literary genre, and that we cannot get anywhere from our data, some critics tackled the problem in a very broad sense, by making Petronius Arbiter the "encyclopedia" of the ancient Roman literary genres:

"We may recognize [...] the fact that Petronius has collected, reinterpreted and parodied all the literary genres and cultural myths of his day [...] Petronius may be studied as a shrewd depicter of customs and also the author of a kind of literary encyclopedia" (22).
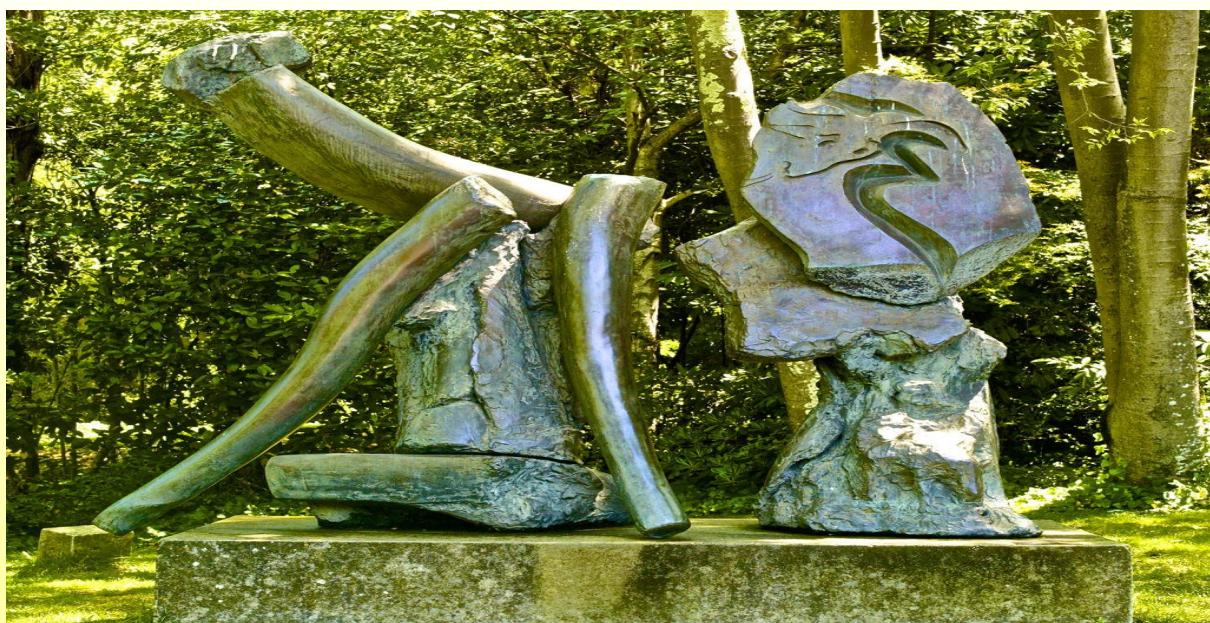
The *Satyricon-encyclopedia* consists of a series of detached epi-
sodes hardly strung together, long-winded digressions and sly com-
ments written in a highly personal style. It is almost impossible to
reconstruct the complete original text of the *Satyricon* which was
and remains a **puzzle** (23). Froma I. Zeitlin's suggestive work
(1971) tried to overcome the problem of genres, saying that,

"Petronius' rejection of the theory of genres can be seen as a genu-
ine aesthetic experiment in the revitalization of literature and also a
rejection of the traditional value of his society and its institutions. In
another sense, his technique of mixing genres can be viewed as a
device used to create an impression of disorder, which he felt to be
an appropriate representation of reality for his particular age" (24).

Zeitlin's performance is both unique and worthy of attention, but it
remains in the realm of speculation.

Petronius' Festive Suicide

Despite the difficult start and the loss of most of so much of the work, Petronius's work had exceptional fortune through the centuries. According to Hugh McElroy:

"The broadest modern acquaintance with Petronius and the *Satyrica* perhaps comes through Fellini's 1969 film Fellini *Satyricon*, which interprets many episodes of the *Satyrica*." (27).

In fact, the *Satyricon* occupied a prominent place in the minds of many contemporary artists such as Federico Fellini and Pier Paolo Pasolini. The latter once told Marcello Mastroianni that he would like to make a film about the suicide of Petronius, because it looked at him like a **festive suicide**" (28). The title of Pasolini's last unfinished novel is titled *Petrolio*, which was defined by Pasolini as a "modern Satyricon" (29).

It's quite easy to see how Pasolini's novel "**Petro-l-io**" [Oil] recalls the name of the great Latin writer "**Petro-n-ius**", by simply replacing "l" with "n". This cryptic calembour or word game created by Pier Paolo Pasolini for his unfinished novel shows how great has been the influence of Petronius Arbiter's *Satyricon* on the Italian artists of the 1960s.

The Contemporary interest in Petronius's work

The lively revival of interest in Petronius's work by contemporary artists working in very different fields (literature and cinema), cannot be interpreted as a mere fortuitous coincidence. They investigated especially the "formal aspects" of Petronius's work , its character of "incompleteness" and "fragmentation", that were in the spotlight of literature in the early decades of the 20th century. The most great Italian writers and artists valued the *Satyricon* in terms of its "supposed realism." So it was regarded as the "mirror" of the Roman society in the time of emperor Nero, where, for example, the wealthy freedmen ("Liberti") had reached an unusual   economic and political level of power.

For the Italian contemporary artists, Petronius became the meticulous and penetrating *observer* of everything in Neronian Rome, a great satirist "without" being a moralist. Petronius Arbiter would contemplate and represent his characters without judging them, and no doubt with a wry smile.   Apart from the "realism" discussed heretofore, there is no doubt that the characters of Petronius's work show a superior cunning intelligence, becoming able to control their emotions in even the most dangerous situations, where cunning intelligence plays a crucial role, immediately recalling to our minds many characters of the *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio.

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Petronius Arbiter and The Matron of Ephesus

We find the story of *The Matron of Ephesus* or *The Widow of Ephesus* among the most famous episodes of the *Satyricon* by Petronius Arbiter, "magister elegantiae" at the sumptuous court of the emperor Nero.

After her husband's death, a virtuous Ephesian matron, accompanied by her faithful maid, follows him to the sepulcher and she does not want to live anymore, and want to starve herself to death. Meantime, two thieves, who are guarded by a soldier, are crucified next to the sepulcher of her husband. At one point the soldier hears the cries of the young widow and her sigh moved him, and at the same time he falls in love with her. At first he tries to convince her to eat, while the maid helps him to find a way of convincing her matron. So the matron of Ephesus is persuaded to eat and then she also relents to soldier's will. The soldier stays with the widow for a very long time, but he forgets his mission.

Meanwhile, the body of one of the two thieves crucified is taken away by his parents and relatives. According to the Roman law, the soldier was to be crucified replacing him on the cross. The young widow shows remarkable presence of mind, saying that, she cannot bear to attend the funerals of the two men who had been her lovers , and that she prefers to see a dead man rather than a living man on the cross. Then she orders that her husband is nailed to the cross, and so saving the life of the soldier.

The Matron of Ephesus and the *Aeneid*

The fortune of *The Matron of Ephesus* was linked to the fact that the short story had independent circulation and was detached from the *Satyricon.* The story of *The Matron of Ephesus* is not original to Petronius Arbiter, but it seems to be a parody of a famous episode of the *Aeneid* (Aeneas's love affair with Queen Dido), as evidenced by the quotations from the Virgilian poem:

" Id cinerem aut manis credis curare sepultos?" [*Aeneid*, IV, 34]. ("Do you believe that the ashes or the buried dead care ?").

"Id cinerem aut manes credis sentire sepultos?" [The Ephesian Matron]. On one point, really, Petronius differs from the *Aeneid*: he replaced the Vergilian "curare" by "sentire".

The Matron of Ephesus would like to have a close relationship with Queen Dido, who at first is determined to remain faithful to the memory of her dead husband Sychaeus. Then Dido is convinced by her sister Anna to surrender to love for Aeneas, which was in all appearance the cause of her tragic end. In fact, when Aeneas leaves her, Dido commits suicide : " *The Matron of Ephesus* is just such a comic double of Virgil *Aeneid* IV, P.I. Barta said with great self-confidence (1).

It is, however, necessary to point out that not all critics see *The Matron of Ephesus* strictly in terms of Virgilian parody. For Ettore Paratore, the influence of classic poets would still have felt as far as learning and the study of Virgil would had been concerned. The same Virgilian quotations are not proof of a conscious parody, whereas, indeed, they are only involuntary reminiscences, demonstrating the long study and the great love that even the skeptical courtier of Nero had dedicated to the works of one of the greatest Latin poets. For Ettore Paratore, this can be important for the formation of literary taste of Petronius, but it has no significance for the literary traditions to which his work may be linked." (2). This was a very intelligent remark , because Petronius Arbiter's real sources seem to be referred to *Milesiae fabulae*, and it has been amply demonstrated by critics. However, the idea of a creative relationship between Queen Dido and *The Matron of Ephesus* is still very impressive, although perhaps it is not easily demonstrated, as is often claimed.

Imitators of The Matron of Ephesus

The Matron of Ephesus was variously imitated in Italy and abroad. We can find a fusion of motifs drawn from The Ephesian Matron in the Novellino by Giovanni Sercambi (1348-1424). Eustachio Manfredi provided a suitable model of imitation in 1709 (3). George Chapman, an English poet and playwright, made a perfect imitation of The Matron of Ephesus , published under the title of The Widow's Tears (about 1605) (4). Another imitation was published by George Chapman under the title of The Conspiracy and Tragedy of Charles Duke of Byron, Marshal of France (1608) (5). An imitation (albeit in a attenuated form) of The Matron of Ephesus has been found in the works by G. D'Annunzio (6). The Matron of Ephesus had found many admirers and imitators in France in writers like La Fontaine (La Matrone d ' Éphèse) and Voltaire (Zadig). And yet, throughout the eighteenth century there were many theatrical performances of The Matron of Ephesus, such as that by Haudard de la Motte (La Matrone d ' Éphèse , 1702), Fuselier (1714), Radet (1792), M. Verconsin (1869), and Alphonse Daudet, who was inspired to write L'Immortel by The Ephesian Matron (7). The fortune of The Matron of Ephesus was also linked to the fact that the short story had independent circulation and was detached from the Satyricon (8). The matron of Ephesus had gained a good reputation in England, particularly among leading contemporary writers such as Christopher Fry. The first play by Christopher Fry, A Phoenix Too Frequent (1947) was based on The Matron of Ephesus (9). But many imitators of The Matron of Ephesus were found in the German musical theatre: "A preliminary survey , related to the reception of the novella, shows that all the operatic transpositions of this story (with only a few exception [Charles Dibdin's The Ephesia Matron, 1769, libretto by Isaac Bickerstaff]) are produced from the 1930s onwards; furthermore, many of these are geographically concentrated in Germany" (10).

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From the Medieval Latin to the Renaissance Humanism

The Proto-Latin covered a large geographical area, penetrating by the North of Italy to Latium and Sicily. However, historically Latin was the language of the ancient Romans. It seems that they took their alphabet from Cumae, which was one of the earliest Greek colonies in Italy, and through the mediation of the Etruscans, adapting it for their needs. The Romans changed the forms of some Greek letters like ф, θ, ζ,, using other alphabetic letters that were not present in Greek like f and u. The Latin language has had a long history, and in any way it underwent considerable changes under the influence of Greek, partly due to the trade among neighboring countries, and partly to cultural reasons.

The passages from one form to the other are recorded in the various stages of cultural history of Latin, ranging from Pre-literary and Archaic Latin to the more mature Classic Latin and literature, thereby closing its trajectory during the Middle Ages, which corresponds to the linguistic transition from Late Latin to Early-Romance dialects in Italy, France, Spain and other countries. Latin had two varieties of the same language even in Classic Latin, which quickly can be classified as a language of everyday use, better known as Vulgar Latin (i.e. the language of everyday use and not gross language) and a language of literary genres that Roman writers adopted. Classical and Vulgar Latin differed substantially in style, which is particularly visible in terms of lexicon.

For example, the sword was called gladius in the language of every-day use, while it was called ensis in poetic style. The same thing can be said about the difference between brand and sword in English or between spada and brando in Italian. This meant that the first word reflects typical patterns of the language of everyday use, while the second certainly is more suitable to the language of poetry, and provides a very good example of the high style of tragedy.

The expansionism of Rome resulted in a sort of export of the lan-guage of everyday use spoken normally by Roman legionaries, the enormous bureaucracy, and merchants who followed the Romans' conquests. The native peoples deal especially with soldiers, officials and merchants. So Latin assimilated by the native populations has been learned by uncultivated merchants and soldiers, which was at the origin of the Romance languages (Italian, Spanish, French, Roma-nian, Portuguese, and Ladin).

The rescue of the Old Latin was due to the Catholic Church, and es-pecially to the monasteries, where, however, only a small part of the ancient literary heritage found safe haven. Indeed, what remains to us of ancient Latin literature is only a heap of ruins. However, the Catholic Church made extensive use of Latin (and of Greek) in the liturgy. R.l. Palmer explained very well that the Christian Latin was strongly influenced by the Greek language and culture. The same Latin name *ecclèsia* (Church) derives from the Greek *ecclesìa*, with the shift of the accent to the penultimate syllable. The strong pene-tration of Greek words in Latin is a phenomenon largely motivated by the fact that all protagonists of the development of Christianity spoke the Greek language. The Gospel manuscripts, before St. Je-rome's translation into Latin, were written in *koine* Greek that was spoken in the Mediterranean region.

The Renaissance Humanism

Charlemagne engaged from Italy and other countries many intellectuals capable of restoring the rules of Latin grammar. However, Latin experienced a happy season during Renaissance Humanism.

Medieval Latin (called Middle Latin) during the 7th and 8th centuries AD became a barbaric language, but all in all also the only language that educated men were reading, writing and understanding in Italy and throughout Europe. Scribal errors were subsequently corrected according to the classical style thanks to the Carolingian renaissance. Charlemagne was an illiterate but knew the role of language as a core value in public administration, so the most illustrious intellectuals were called to aid the restoration of the Latin language and culture when they seemed to have fallen into an intolerable decline. In short, no clerk has be found able to prepare and arrange public documents without committing any gross mistake at the Court of Charlemagne.

While many texts written in Latin still possessed a certain dignity in Italy, ignorance of Latin became so serious in Gaul that, according to Dag Norberg, some clerks had no knowledge of how the six cases in Latin need to be appropriately inflected. Shortly, they gave the impression that they didn't understand what they were writing. Many of them instead of writing *pro largitate tua* (thanks for all your benefits) were writing *pro pargitate tuae,* i.e. a meaningless phrase. The confusion was so great, that most clerks did not make any distinction between genitive and ablative.

Hence therefore the importance of cultural shift arranged by Charlemagne, who engaged from Italy and other countries many intellectuals capable of restoring the rules of Latin grammar. There were among them Paul Deacon (720-799), Pietro da Pisa (744-799 AD) and Paolino d'Aquileia (750-802 AD), who were able to write in Latin on a higher level. Thanks for their help and meticulous work the results were excellent, so much so that, according to Dag Norberg, the Latin language restored by them (called Latin Scholasticism, because they were able to write in Latin) had been a brilliant operation.

On the approach of the year 1000, the Latin language has made substantial progress in its road, and during this period a renewed interest in the ancient writers (Virgil, Cicero, and Ovid) occurred, thanks mainly to the development of the most ancient universities in Europe. The University of Bologna dates back to thirteenth century (1087 or 1088), while many universities were founded later, like the University of Paris, founded in 1050, and the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge, founded respectively in 1167 and 1209 . *Vulgar Latin*, that is, the Latin spoken by common people, was transformed into the various national languages, as evidenced by the Oath(s) of Strasbourg (written in High-German in the ninth century AD) and the *Placito Capuano* of the year 960 in Italy, which began with these words: *Sao ko kelle terre* (I know that those lands). Thus the Romance languages born from Latin were spread throughout Europe.

Latin experienced a happy season during Renaissance Humanism, which, however, has been more ideal than substantial. Raffaele Spongano in his edition of *I primi tre libri della famiglia* (The First Three Books) by Leon Battista Alberti wrote that Italian and foreign humanists were strongly convinced about their imitation of the classical style, but the syntactic structure of Old Latin was lost. Medieval Latin was dead, but in its place there arose a new Latin, in which ancient words and morphology survived, but not the structure of sentences in relation to the thought.

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